

Message Text

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62

ACTION HEW-08

INFO OCT-01 ARA-16 INR-11 IO-14 MED-03 NSAE-00 PA-04

RSC-01 SCA-01 SCI-06 USIA-15 PRS-01 CIAE-00 AID-20

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FM AMCONSUL SAO PAULO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5480

INFO AMEMBASSY BRASILIA

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SWEL, BR

SUBJECT: RESIDENT AMERICANS IN SAO PAULO HAVE MENINGITIS

EPIDEMIC EXPLAINED BY AMERICAN AUTHORITY

REF: SAO PAULO 1749 AND PREVIOUS

1. SUMMARY: ON AUGUST 8, UNDER THE AUSPICS OF THE CONSULATE GENERAL, A REPRESENTATIVE GROUP OF AMERICANS RESIDENT IN SAO PAULO MET WITH DR. JOSEPH MCCORMICK OF THE CONTAGIOUS DISEASE CENTER, ATLANTA, GEORGIA, TO DISCUSS THE SIGNIFICANCE TO THEM OF THE SAO PAULO MENINGITIS EPIDEMIC. AS A RESULT, THE AMERICAN COMMUNITY WILL HAVE A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE PROBLEM AND SHOULD WEATHER THE CONTINUING EPIDEMIC WITH FAR GREATER EQUANIMITY. END SUMMARY.

2. SINCE THE SAO PAULO MENINGITIS EPIDEMIC BECAME A DAILY HEADLINE ISSUE ABOUT TWO WEEKS AGO, THE AMERICAN COMMUNITY HERE, WHICH NUMBERS IN EXCESS OF 10,000, HAS BECOME EXTREMELY EDGY AND MANY HAVE EXPRESSED CONCERN ABOUT LEAVING THEIR FAMILIES IN BRAZIL. CONFLICTING REPORTS ABOUT THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF THE EPIDEMIC, THE APPEARACH IN THE MARKETS OF QUACK PREVENTATIVES IN LIEU OF NON-AVAILABLE VACCINE AND A GENERAL IGNORANCE OF THE NATURE OF THE DISEASE, ITS SYMPTOMATOLOGY AND ITS TREATMENT, HAVE INTENSIFIED THIS

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UNREST AND CONFUSION AND RESULTED IN A MOUNTING NUMBER OF INQUIRIES

TO US FOR ADVICE. MOREOVER, BECAUSE THE EPIDEMIC HAS ATTRACTED INTERNATIONAL ATTENTION, WE HAVE BEEN RECEIVING INQUIRIES FROM ABROAD ABOUT THE ADVISABILITY OF VISITING OR MOVING TO SAO PAULO.

3. IN AN ATTEMPT TO ALLAY THESE FEARS, WE ASKED DR. JOSEPH MCCORMICK OF THE CONTAGIOUS DISEASE CENTER TO MEET WITH A REPRESENTATIVE CROSS-SECTION OF THE AMERICAN COMMUNITY TO EXPLAIN THE SITUATION AND ANSWER THEIR QUESTIONS. DR. MCCORMICK HAS BEEN IN SAO PAULO SINCE AUGUST 4 STUDYING THE SITUATION FIRSTHAND.

4. THE MEETING WAS HELD ON THE AFTERNOON OF AUGUST 8 IN THE CONSULATE GENERAL. SIXTEEN PERSONS ATTENDED, INCLUDING REPRESENTATIVES OF ALL "AMERICAN" SCHOOLS, THE AMERICAN SOCIETY AND INDUSTRY, INCLUDING THE PHYSICIAN OF A LARGE AMERICAN COMPANY PLANNING TO SOON SEND LARGE NUMBERS OF AMERICAN FAMILIES HERE. IT WAS UNDERSTOOD THAT THOSE ATTENDING WOULD PASS ALONG THE SUBSTANCE OF THE MEETING TO THEIR ORGANIZATIONS.

5. BY EVERY MEASURE, THE MEETING WAS A GREAT SUCCESS. THOSE ATTENDING LEFT THE 90 MINUTE MEETING WITH A CLEAR PICTURE OF THE NATURE OF THE EPIDEMIC, ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THEM, THEIR FAMILIES, AND THE AMERICAN SCHOOL POPULATION OF NEARLY 2,000. DR. MCCORMICK'S EXCELLENT PRESENTATION SHOULD DO MUCH TO ALLAY THE NATURAL FEARS THAT WERE BEING STIMULATED BY IGNORANCE AND MISUNDERSTANDING AND TO PREPARE THE AMERICAN POPULATION PSYCHOLOGICALLY FOR WHAT IS LIKELY TO BE A PROLONGED PERIOD OF EPIDEMIC MENINGITIS HERE.

6. FOLLOWING ARE SOME OF THE POINTS MADE BY DR. MCCORMICK WHICH MIGHT BE USEFUL TO THE DEPARTMENT AND TO OTHER POSTS WHEN DISCUSSING THE SAO PAULO EPIDEMIC:

A. THIS MAY BE THE FIRST TIME IN MEDICAL HISTORY THAT BOTH TYPE A AND TYPE C MENINGOCOCCAL MENINGITIS HAVE BEEN IN EPIDEMIC PROPORTIONS TOGETHER AT THE SAME TIME.

B. THE EPIDEMIC WILL PROBABLY PERSIST AT CURRENT HIGH AND POSSIBLY HIGHER LEVELS UNTIL SUFFICIENT QUANTITIES OF TYPE A AND TYPE C VACCINE ARE AVAILABLE AND THE MASS INNOCULATION PROGRAM GETS UNDERWAY-- PERHAPS IN EARLY SEPTEMBER.

C. THERE IS NO SCIENTIFIC BASIS AT THIS TIME FOR ADVISING PEOPLE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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NOT TO VISIT SAO PAULO, OR FOR DISCOURAGING EMPLOYEES OF AMERICAN COMPANIES FROM TRANSFERRING HERE.

D. THE SAO PAULO HEALTH AUTHORITIES ARE COPING WITH THE PROBLEM, IN PUBLIC HEALTH TERMS, EFFECTIVELY, GIVEN THE PAUCITY OF VACCINE AVAILABLE TO THEM.

E. EXCELLENT TREATMENT IS AVAILABLE IN SAO PAULO FOR PERSONS CONTRACTING THE DISEASE.

F. THERE IS NO SCIENTIFIC BASIS FOR ALTERING SCHOOL PROGRAMS HERE

BECAUSE OF THE EPIDEMIC.

G. TO DATE, THERE HAS NOT BEEN A SINGLE CASE OF THE DISEASE REPORTED AMONG THE AMERICAN COMMUNITY.

H. BOTH THE TYPE A AND THE TYPE C VACCINES, THOUGH PRESENTLY NOT AVAILABLE, ARE SAFE AND EFFECTIVE AND CAN BE ADMINISTERED SIMULTANEOUSLY.

I. THE INCIDENCE OF THE DISEASE TENDS TO INCREASE IN COLD, RAINY PERIODS BECAUSE PEOPLE CONGREGATE INDOORS, IN CLOSE PROXIMITY NOT BECAUSE THE BACTERIA IS MORE VIRULENT THEN.

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